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3 April 2019

Ms Nicky Ross  
Headteacher  
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Dear Ms Ross

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Cuckoo Hall Academy**

Following my visit with Helen Bailey, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 19 to 20 March 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in July 2017. The full list of the areas for improvement that were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that the school may appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer or equivalent of the Cuckoo Hall Academies Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Enfield. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jude Wilson

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in July 2017.**

- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
  - leaders at all levels make accurate judgments about the quality of teaching, learning and assessment
  - the assessment system supports teachers in planning to meet pupils' needs and in helping them to make strong, sustained progress
  - the curriculum is reviewed to make sure that it helps pupils to make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics
  - skilled governors are recruited and retained to improve the impact of the local governing board
  - governors rigorously monitor the impact of the pupil premium spending on the progress that disadvantaged pupils make
  - teaching assistants are helped to improve their skills and subject knowledge, in order to maximise their impact on pupils' progress
  - provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) supports them to make good progress from accurately assessed starting points
  - the learning environment and the quality of teaching in the early years are improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to ascertain how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of governance is recommended in order to ascertain how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

## **Report on the third monitoring inspection on 19 March 2019 to 20 March 2019**

### **Evidence**

This third monitoring visit focused on the effectiveness of leadership and management and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Inspectors met with school leaders to discuss the impact of their work. The inspection team held discussions with teaching staff, including a group of teaching assistants, and visited lessons in all year groups in a range of subjects. Inspectors reviewed pupils' progress over time through looking at a sample of pupils' books and talking to pupils about their learning. Inspectors listened to key stages 1 and 2 pupils reading and spoke to parents at the start of the school day. The inspection team met with two governors and the school's local authority improvement adviser. Inspectors checked the single central record of staff suitability checks.

### **Context**

Since the last monitoring visit, the school has had no changes in school leadership. Two members of the teaching staff have left. No new teachers have joined the school. Leaders have moved some teachers to different year groups. Three new parent governors were appointed to the governing body (Academy Advisory Committee) in January 2019. The Rapid Recovery Group, comprising a number of external and internal stakeholders, was formed in December 2018.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

Leaders have started to build on the improvements evident at the last monitoring visit. They remain clear in their vision for the school and support each other well. Leaders' joined-up approach to school improvement extends to members of staff. They value the stability and consistency in leadership. Leaders set clear expectations about how the school can improve. Staff understand that improving the quality of teaching and learning will result in better outcomes for their pupils. Parents spoken to are generally positive about the school.

Leaders have an accurate and precise understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Their plans for school improvement are detailed and precise. They review the impact of their actions regularly and amend their strategies accordingly.

Leaders have set ambitious targets and are making good progress towards these. They recognise the need to develop capacity within leadership, particularly in terms of middle management.

Leaders have continued their extensive programme of staff training to improve the quality of teaching and learning. They know that sustained improvement is needed.

Leaders use effective systems to monitor the impact of training. This includes weekly planning meetings with teaching staff, lesson observations, informal drop-ins, discussions with pupils and regular book scrutinies. Leaders have broadened their work with other local schools and each year group has at least one linked school. Teachers work with these schools to gather ideas, teach jointly, assess pupils' work and get feedback on their teaching. This has proved invaluable experience for staff and has given them a wealth of expertise to draw on.

School leaders pinpoint the support and training that individual teachers need in order to improve further. They make sure that staff, in addition to whole-school training, receive bespoke training based on personalised targets that leaders have set with them. Since the last monitoring visit, teachers now consider more deeply the process of learning. They think about what they want their pupils to know and understand, with varying degrees of success. Leaders have developed 'agile practice' so that lesson time is used more productively. Joint planning with support staff helps to deliver a seamless transition between learning activities so that time in lessons is not wasted. The quality of teaching and learning has improved as a result.

Leaders are of the firm belief that, historically, teachers' assessments have been overgenerous. More frequent moderation, particularly with schools outside of the trust, has given teachers and leaders a credible baseline to underpin their judgements of pupils' ability. As a result, assessment information is increasingly accurate. However, this has a negative impact on progress measures as current pupils have a legacy of high prior attainment at key stage 1. Leaders do not have an 'excuse culture'. They are realistic and have not shied away from the challenge of meeting exceptionally high targets. Year 6 pupils have a package of extensive interventions to ensure that they are well prepared for secondary school.

The provision for pupils with SEND has developed since the last monitoring visit. The school has ensured that pupils with the most complex needs get better support. Support staff and teachers receive specific training to help them deal with the varied and individual needs of pupils. Leaders recently reviewed learning support plans so that they reflect and link closely with individual education, health and care plans. As a result, support is more consistently effective in class. Parents are now more involved in setting targets and evaluating their children's progress. They are very positive about the support given to their children.

Leaders have improved the outdoor area in early years. Leaders have modelled how to set up a good learning environment for children and monitor this closely. As a result, staff make better use of the outdoor space. They make sure that children have a range of purposeful activities. This is still at an early stage.

The quality of governance continues to improve. Robust systems are in place to monitor school improvement and to challenge and support school leaders. School leaders have helped to induct new governors, training them on how to be effective

in their roles and specific responsibilities. Further training is planned to help new governors have a better understanding of, for example, assessment information.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

Teachers have a range of in-house and external training to develop their practice. Staff respond well to the guidance and feedback they receive. Following the last monitoring visit, training has focused on improving subject knowledge, particularly in writing and grammar. This has had a noticeable impact as teachers show more confidence in using subject-specific vocabulary, which, in turn, develops pupils' knowledge. For example, Year 5 pupils shared ideas with each other about which stylistic features of poetry to use.

School-to-school support has helped to develop the teaching of writing. Teachers are more aware of what high-quality writing looks like and have higher expectations of what their pupils can do. Teachers now plan more effective writing lessons. They have started to teach and embed key skills gradually. Pupils' work over time shows that, increasingly, teachers now plan work that matches pupils' needs. However, the least able pupils, particularly in lower key stage 2, struggle to complete writing tasks when they have not received sufficient help in structuring their work. In some classes, teachers do not address pupils' misconceptions, such as understanding the difference between nouns and adjectives.

Reading has been a key element of staff training since the last visit. The teaching of reading has improved as a result. Teachers and leaders have introduced guided reading in Years 1 to 3 at set times in the school day. They have introduced a reading toolkit to help pupils deepen their understanding. Staff follow the systematic structure set out by school leaders and are becoming increasingly confident in delivering reading lessons. Support staff have also received training so that they can support teachers effectively. However, this approach is not embedded in all classes and teaching staff are still getting used to it. Teachers also need to ensure that independent tasks are always purposeful and linked to pupils' reading. Pupils' individual reading records are often incomplete.

The reading programme in Years 5 and 6 continues to develop reading skills successfully. Pupils show a secure understanding of specific skills needed to access challenging texts. They enjoy reading and like that the tasks often build on their learning in other subjects. For example, pupils could visualise battlements in a text based on their study of Anglo-Saxons in history. Year 4 have recently started to use the same programme, but it is at a very early stage.

In phonics, pupils are now taught in ability groups within their year group. Staff review these groupings regularly to ensure that pupils' needs are met. Lower-ability pupils and pupils with SEND make particularly strong progress as a result of effective teaching. Phonics teachers have weekly training sessions to refresh and update their skills. However, staff do not consistently use the phonics programme

adopted by the school. The most able pupils are not always stretched sufficiently.

Pupils are proud of the work they complete in subjects such as history, geography and science. They discuss in some depth, using relevant vocabulary, topics they have studied, such as deforestation, electricity and the solar system. The most effective learning is evident when lessons have been carefully sequenced to build up pupils' knowledge and skills over time. Some topics are not covered well, particularly when supply staff cover lessons or if pupils have not had sufficient time to explore the topic. French and religious education are taught sporadically. Leaders have plans to review the curriculum so that pupils get a good quality of education.

Teachers have continued to refine their skills in teaching mathematics. They follow the approach set by leaders to ensure that concepts build on pupils' prior knowledge. Teachers increasingly think carefully about which different strategies and resources will best suit their pupils. At times, teaching moves pupils on when they have not completely understood a particular concept. Teachers need to be confident in adapting their lessons so that pupils do not have gaps in their understanding.

### **External support**

The trust provides effective support. It has continued to commission the local authority school improvement services and external consultants to help staff improve their practice. The Rapid Recovery Group conducts half-termly reviews of teaching and learning across the school. Specialist advisers in areas such as English, mathematics, early years and SEND continue to advise leaders and deliver high-quality staff training.